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Pomme de Terre Disc Golf Course opens

Summary: A nine-hole disc golf course, pioneered by University of Minnesota, Morris students opened May 16 at Pomme de Terre Park. It's an experience that all ages can enjoy.

(May 8, 2008)-A nine-hole disc golf course, pioneered by University of Minnesota, Morris students, opened May 16 at Pomme de Terre Park. UMM senior Eagan Heath, 2007-2008 Morris Campus Student Association (MCSA) president and initiator of the Pomme de Terre Disc Golf Course, talked with News Service writer Jeshua Livstrom regarding the "experience that all ages can enjoy."

Q: When will the course be completed?

A: Grand opening of the course will be held at 11 a.m. Friday, May 16, at the park.

Q: What is "Frisbee golf" and how do you play?

A: Disc golf consists of throwing discs (like Frisbees but more specialized) into metal chains that drop the disc into a basket. This is the equivalent of sinking a hole in golf. Also like golf, the game guides the player through a course with obstacles and pars for each hole. Instead of selecting different clubs, intermediate and advanced players switch between discs, some that fly far, some midrange, some for putting and some for specialty throws like rollers or hooks. We are building a nine-hole course, but there is always the option of expanding to 18 down the line.

Q: What was the inspiration triggering the development of the course?

A: I have heard people talking about getting a course ever since I came here, but I wanted to actually make it happen before I graduated. I was hanging out at Pomme de Terre Park last summer when I realized that there was a beautiful portion of the park—full of trees—that was mowed but never used for anything except for the bike path. I used to play disc golf in high school in my hometown of Idaho Falls, Idaho. Though the area at Pomme de Terre is flat, it is a nice place with some great potential holes (aka a golf course).

Q: What steps were involved in its completion?

I did some preliminary research over the summer and pitched the idea to the Morris Campus Student Association and the Senior Legacy Committee. Some people in both groups were skeptical. Could we raise the money? Would students use it? I was certain that if we built it, they would come. That's been the case in most communities that have put them in.

After getting the endorsement of the UMM Class of 2008 and MCSA in the fall, a small group of dedicated students and I went to the Morris Parks Board and the Morris City Council to have them approve the plan so we could install the baskets at Pomme de Terre Park. The Parks Board had recently exhausted most of its funds by building a spray park out there, so they were ecstatic to learn that we planned on fundraising all the money from town and campus organizations.

Q: How was the course funded and sponsored?

A: From the beginning, we conceived of the project as not simply a way of adding to the recreational options of Morris, but also a way of building a positive relationship between UMM students and the community. While we were fairly certain we could raise the money and install the course by the end of the school year, we were astounded by the rapid generosity of both the campus and the town. Organizations that gave \$1,000 would receive their name on a specific hole in addition to the donor sign at the beginning of the course. In a mere eight weeks, we raised over \$7,200, more than enough to put in a full course with signs. Our donors included Marie Hansen's local daycare, the Morris Area Women of Today, the UMM Alumni Association, retired English professor Laird Barber (who bought an entire hole), the Office of Residential Life, Riverview Dairy Farms, the Morris Sun Tribune, Bremer Bank and Bank of the West. Concrete of Morris has agreed to donate the concrete for the baskets and signs and many generous faculty, staff, students and parents gave to the Class of 2008 Senior Legacy Fund.

We are enthralled that the City has been so cooperative and is willing to contribute the labor to install the course. We are also enthralled that so many incredible donors came through so quickly and that it looks like we will be able to play a round before graduation.

Q: Who has contributed to the development of the course?

A: In terms of organizing the project, many people have helped, but the consistent group of us has been Jenny Wermerskirchen (the MCSA VP for Finance and Operations), Brady Janzen (a football player and member of MCSA), Michael Peterson (who loves disc golf) and me (Eagan Heath).

Q: Who can play Frisbee golf?

A: I know from experience that people of all ages can enjoy disc golf, whether as amateurs, intermediates or pros. We have already been contacted by a professional who is interested in organizing a tournament. There will be a children's summer class that teaches the game and there are plans to incorporate disc golf into next year's First-Year Orientation at UMM. I have no doubts that the game will catch on in Morris as it has with the more than 100 courses throughout other Minnesota towns. We have been in touch with John's Total Entertainment and John Amundson plans to sell the discs at his store in downtown Morris.

Q: How much will it cost to play?

A: Using the course will be absolutely free and the average disc golf disc costs about \$10. (They are different than catching Frisbees as they are designed to fly great distances.)

Q: Anything further to add?

A: I am proud to help provide such a fun recreational sport for Morris. It is cheap and gets people walking around a beautiful part of Pomme de Terre Park that has up until now been mostly unused. While the game is fun right from your first time playing it, it is challenging enough to keep you playing for years (the baskets we ordered are guaranteed for 20 years). I am confident that many others will fall in love with the excitement of skillfully weaving between trees and hearing the gratifying sound of a disc hitting the chains.

Photo: UMM students, l-r, Eagan Heath, Jenny Wermerskirchen and Michael Peterson, initiate the new course.

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